

**Opening Statement
of
Chairman Henry J. Hyde**

**Full Committee Briefing and Hearing
“The Global Water Crisis: Evaluating U.S. Strategies to Enhance Access to Safe Water and
Sanitation”**

**2172 Rayburn House Office Building
Wednesday, June 29, 2005**

The Committee briefing will come to order.

Water-related illnesses claim the life of one child approximately every 8-15 seconds, killing an average of 3,000-5,000 children a day and up to 5 million people annually. To put it into perspective for those of us sitting here today, that is the equivalent of full seating capacity at Yankee Stadium multiplied by 87.

The statistics associated with global water issues are shocking. According to the World Health Organization, 1.2 billion people don't have access to safe water, and 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation. According to the UN Task Force on Water and Sanitation, more than "...half the people in the developing world are suffering from one or more of the main diseases associated with inadequate provision of water supply and sanitation."

Time is of the essence. Members of this Committee should bring the same courage and constructive contributions to this debate as they have to the HIV/AIDS pandemic discussions in their efforts to bring an end to the water crisis. Evidence shows strong linkages exist between access to safe water and sanitation and other development sectors, including the areas of public health, economic development, education, gender equality, and agriculture. If we are to combat some of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of our time, we as policymakers need to find innovative mechanisms and solutions that combine technology and diplomacy to ensure access to safe water and sanitation to those in need.

We should not let a paralysis of political will among ourselves or those in the Administration prevent the United States Government from pursuing policies that seek to enhance the coordination of water-related programs in our foreign policy. Safe water is a vital strategic resource, and there can be no sustainable development or long-term security without it.

I want to thank Congressman Blumenauer for his leadership in confronting this issue and introducing H.R.1973, the "Water for the Poor Act of 2005," the general focus of today's hearing. This legislation would amend the Foreign Assistance Act by broadening specified areas of development assistance objectives. It is a tangible effort toward creating a coordinated plan of action by the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development

regarding our involvement in helping to ameliorate the global water crisis by making affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation in developing countries a strategic part of our foreign assistance programs.

Mr. Blumenauer, I look forward to working on this legislation with you and our colleagues in the Senate who have drafted a similar bill. I also want to say that the late Senator Paul Simon had a significant role in drawing my attention to this issue. I hope that the Senator's memory will be respectfully and appropriately served through final legislation that continues his visionary legacy.

The Administration has taken some noteworthy actions in response to these challenges. The Water for the Poor and Clean Water for People initiatives equaling almost \$1.5 billion combined are positive contributions that will advance the UN Millennium Development Goals and implement the Johannesburg Plan by 2015 to reduce the number of people by one-half who have no access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Accordingly, the international community has designated the ten-year period between 2005 and 2015 as "The International Decade for Action - Water for Life." Meeting the benchmarks set by the Millennium Development Goals would require the international community to double its current level of funding for water programs. However, I believe that meeting these benchmarks requires more than increasing assistance. Attention needs to be paid to the way funds are distributed. For example, data suggest that the countries most in need of access to safe water and sanitation have received the least amount of donor assistance.

As with the HIV/AIDS crisis, the lack of safe water and sanitation is more than a threat to humanity. It is also an enormous threat to global development and our national security. I quote Assistant Secretary John F. Turner when he testified before Members of this Committee last year, "[T]he CIA reports that, by 2015, nearly half of the world's population will live in countries that are water stressed." In addition, there are over 260 river basins shared by two or more nations. For example, ten riparian nations all vie for the water resources of the Nile River. The relationship between water and politics is rapidly emerging as countries compete for and attempt to lay claim of critical water sources.

Today's hearing will examine the role of water projects in our foreign assistance programs and provide further insight on how we can improve the United States strategy to ensure access to safe water and sanitation to those in need of this fundamental source of life.

We have three distinguished panels before us today, together representing the Bush Administration, the United Nations and water experts from the nongovernmental community. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished briefers and witnesses.

I will now yield to my colleague and friend, Ranking Democratic Member Tom Lantos, for any opening remarks he may wish to make.

Mr. Lantos.